



charlestown playhouse

A Parent Cooperative Preschool

Date: April 9, 2020

Chester County Community Foundation – Covid-19 Rapid Response Mini-Grant

Contact Information

Organization Name: Charlestown Playhouse Nursery School
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In a few brief paragraphs, please explain:

- 1. What geographic area is served?** *(If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served)*
Northeast parts of the county, including the Phoenixville, Schuylkill, Charlestown, East Pikeland, West Pikeland, East Vincent, West Vincent, East Coventry, East Nantmeal, Warwick and Uwchlan townships.
- 2. What population is served, what has been the impact of COVID-19, and how has your nonprofit responded?**
The Charlestown Playhouse is a non-profit, cooperative preschool and kindergarten located in Phoenixville, PA. Since the school's founding in 1936, it has provided high quality early childhood education and strong community connections for families, staff and alumni. The school has been closed since March 16 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and will be closed through the end of the school year in accordance with state mandates.

The school serves an average of 65 families (72 children) a year. The Playhouse is committed to a diverse and inclusive community, with 25% of our families receiving financial assistance, 10% identifying as families of color (within 5% of county demographics), and 7% of students receiving educational support services this year. Our cooperative structure and large volunteer-driven fundraising events ensure that tuition is kept purposefully low in order to be viable for many income-constrained families, with at least 40% falling under the 'Alice' threshold.

Because so many families are financially distressed, the Board decided to refund tuition for April, and now for May and June as well. The school did not have to make this decision, but because we operate as a non-profit, and as a community that must support each other, we felt it was in the best interest of the school to give our families the financial relief. While some families who are still employed have chosen to donate their tuition back, (which we see as a signal of the dedication families have to our school), the school faces a significant shortfall.

The budget shortfall will be compounded if we need to cancel summer camp programs (\$23,000 budgeted income). The Board is continually assessing what CDC predictions and Governor Wolf's edicts mean for our programs. Options range from complete cancellation to shorter sessions later in the summer for smaller groups of children with enhanced sanitation protocols.

Charlestown Playhouse has been financially successful for its entire history, due in part to large volunteer-driven fundraisers accounting for roughly 17% (\$81,000) of our overall income, which have been severely curtailed. Our Auction Gala in March was cancelled and the Online portion postponed. Our biannual public Consignment Sale



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started as a community response to a different type of disaster, WWII, and now draws thousands of shoppers and consignors. The Spring Sale is cancelled for the first time, and Fall Sale may be as well due to concern about large gatherings and a second wave of disease. The Sale is run completely by volunteers, many of whom are over 65 and more at risk.

We also feel immense responsibility for our staff. Many of our teachers have been part of the school community for decades. They are dedicated to the school, and have created a school with exceptional education, vitality, and community support. Several were facing family health crises prior to coronavirus which make us unwilling to terminate insurance. We are applying to the Payroll Protection Plan to allow us to continue to pay our teachers and have continuous health care while we are closed. Additionally we hope to apply for a Small Business Association loan to continue necessary insurance and utility payments while we are closed.

1. How much funding is sought? How does this compare to your annual operating budget? What will the funding be used for? What is the expected timeframe for use of funds?

Charlestown Playhouse is seeking \$5,000, which represents 0.9% of our annual operating budget. While it sounds small, our income is primarily based on even smaller contributions. Even yearly tuition is less than \$5,000 (\$4,175). This grant would help us to close the shortfall from our cancelled Auction Gala and Spring Sale. The funding would be used for financial aid for working families during summer camp (if operational), or during the upcoming school year. We anticipate a much higher degree of need for financial assistance for many of our families who are self-employed and employed in service industries. We also anticipate needing to deep-clean according to CDC guidelines prior to re-opening.

We are grateful for any amount of support from the Chester County Community Foundation. We have been serving the Phoenixville community for over 80 years, and we are committed to being a part of the recovery for children and families from this unprecedented emergency.

Please note that because the school is closed, I should be contacted on my cell phone 610-996-2750.

Sincerely,

Laura Sacco
Head of School
Charlestown Playhouse, Inc.